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Music in the Montessori Classroom

"...success [in music education] is bound up with the need for the production of plenty of music around the child, so that there is set up an environment calculated to develop musical sense and intelligence."

—Maria Montessori, *The Discovery of the Child*



Music is a universal language, loved by children and adults in cultures throughout the world. Children have an uninhibited inclination to move, dance, and make music, as well as an innate capacity to appreciate all types of music. Musical activities are included in the daily life of the Montessori classroom and respected as much as other curriculum subjects.

While many schools bring in a music teacher to give weekly classes, it's essential that classroom teachers integrate music into everyday activities through song, movement, instruments, music appreciation, the Montessori Bells, and Walking on the Line to music.

What Children Learn from Music

Research shows that music is fundamental in early childhood education, helping children to develop in various ways, including problem-solving and logic skills. Language acquisition is enhanced as children learn songs with varied vocabulary, meter, and rhyme. Cultural

lessons are enriched with songs about continents, planets, respect for Earth, and much more.

Music gives children opportunities to perfect their movements and refine coordination, with songs such as "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes," and "Farmer in the Dell." Music and movement provide children with ways to express their own unique spirits.

If You're Shy about Singing

Everyone can successfully provide children with opportunities for musical expression. If you're shy about singing, teach yourself songs by singing along to a CD of children's songs as you drive. Since children have naturally high voices, you'll notice that many songs for children are sung quite high to help them match the pitch. When you're ready to introduce these songs to children, you can play the tune on a lap harp or sing with the CD playing softly in the background.

If some children rarely join the singing, don't be discouraged. A parent once told me that her child was spontaneously singing songs he had learned at school. I was surprised because in class he preferred to just listen.

Music Activities

Toddlers naturally enjoy singing, dancing, and clapping along to music. Let young children explore percussion instruments such as shakers, drums, and tambourines. In the Montessori primary class, three-year-olds are ready for the Sound Cylinders and Montessori Bells. For Walking on the Line activities, there are several excellent CDs that will inspire children to tiptoe, march, gallop, and skip as the tempo and mood of the music change. (See our article, [Walking on the Meandering Line](#).)

Teachers can also create musical activities:

- Read books about the lives of musicians and composers.
- Play classical and world music during the work period.
- Give children the opportunity to hear instruments played. Invite parents to come play their viola or clarinet!
- Set up a shelf with musical instruments that can make softer sounds, such as the [rainstick](#), [kalimba](#), and shakers.
- Create music appreciation activities with [nomenclature cards](#).
- Provide a listening table where children can wear headphones and look at books with accompanying music CDs, such as [Can You Hear It?](#)
- Sing songs for cleanup or circle time. ("Good morning Ella. Good morning Desmond. Good morning Juanita. We're glad you're here today.")
- Bring a basket of [instruments](#) covered with a cloth to a group lesson. Ask the children to close their eyes as you play each one in turn, hidden under the cloth. Ask, "Guess which instrument I played. Yes, it sounded like the metal triangle, but it was the cow bell." Give the children an opportunity to play the instruments.
- Teach songs with increasing complexity as children progress. By age five, many children are capable of singing songs with challenging melodies and many verses, as well as rounds such as "Row, Row, Row Your Boat."

The Gift of Music

Whenever I visit a Montessori class, I'm always touched to see children singing as they work. I then know that music is an important part of the life of that classroom. During my internship in a lower elementary class, I was surprised that the teacher felt there wasn't enough time for singing. I asked if I could teach songs during transition times: lining up for recess, gathering for a class meeting, or walking to the library. Instead of squirming while waiting, children were engaged in singing and learning. We never had a moment that was officially dedicated to music. Yet by spring, the class put on a concert with songs that had been learned in those little cracks and crevices of transition moments.

Maria and Mario Montessori understood that music is one of the fundamental spiritual needs of humans. All children can learn to sing on pitch and carry a tune, and even, with the advanced lessons on the Montessori Bells, learn to read and write music. Starting simply, teachers can give children the opportunity to participate in one of the great joys of life - listening to and making music.

"Music... formed part of the sacred heritage that each group...transmitted to their children."

—Mario Montessori, *"Man's Spiritual Expressions: Language and Music"*

—by Irene Baker, MEd, Montessori Educational Consultant at Montessori Services. She holds both primary (ages 3-6) and elementary (ages 6-12) Montessori certifications and has taught at all three levels. For over 15 years, she has served as a Montessori teacher-trainer for both primary and elementary levels and

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